

SE24 – Successful Funding Application

The Charter Schools Educational Trust were successful with a recent funding application through the London Community Energy Fund (LCEF) on behalf of The Charter School North Dulwich and Charles Dickens Primary School.

There are two elements for funding to each of the successful applications, one being a capital grant from LCEF and the other capital investment from a local community fund, SE24, whereby the funds are repayable from the energy savings that are achieved by the works over 10 years. The capital grant isn't repaid and is essentially free money.

School/Project	Capital Grant	Capital Investment
The Charter School North Dulwich LED Project	£44,900.00	£134,000.00
The Charter School North Dulwich Solar Panel Project	£14,300.00	£76,000.00 - £82,000.00
Charles Dickens Primary School LED Project	£11,400.00	£23,000.00
Totals	£70,600.00	£233,000.00

SE24, that have supported us throughout the application process, tried to involve the parents of the schools and other stakeholders to be part of the community fund which effectively gives them a return on their investment in supporting the school. It was deemed by the schools leadership, and the local governing bodies, that given the inclusive nature of the Trust, that asking parents to support the project financially was not in the best interests of the organisations. There was also concerns that the investment is not 100% risk free, so not something we could promote actively.

This meant that investment process was run independently from the schools, which is understandable, but would have been good exposure for SE24 in their local area. Time was very much of the essence so this did impede on the decision making process.

Once the funds for the community investment had been raised the Trust embarked on the process of consent through the Education and Skills Agency (ESFA) as under the terms of the Trusts funding agreement, financial leases are not permitted without prior consent, and the solar contract was deemed to be such a lease.

This approval process took around 12 weeks, it had the added complication that The Charter School North Dulwich landlord is the Dulwich Estate which added another layer of approval. All of the parties involved worked tirelessly to be get the approval over the line, but in any process such as this with the legal aspect it will always take more time and more cost than expected.

These delays, and costs, inevitably impacted on the actual works start date and ultimately the financial benefits reaching the school. We now are in a position with the solar works that we hope that they will be completed by mid-November so the school can start feeling the benefit through the harsher winter months when the costs at their highest.

What would make the process easier? How could Southwark support a School/Academy for future funding applications?

With the usual pressures on schools/Trusts capacity is always an issue, this running alongside a pandemic was even more of a squeeze. Having a pre-approved lease through a local authority already recognised by the ESFA would save a lot of time and money. Just having that legal support costs covered by an external party would be a great help in getting these types of projects over the line.

One thing we weren't able to do was to spread the word of the project amongst our vast number of parents for reasons outlined above. If there was a way that Southwark could help promote the projects it may be a way round some of the issues we found when trying to launch the fund.

Funding in general is quite hard to come by and sometimes ends up with the organisation with the most resources or finances. There will be smaller Southwark schools that require this support that don't know where to reach out to for funding, these schools will have more outdated M&E infrastructure than most.

So in summary, any support around the legal aspects, advertising the community fund, and support for making applications would be gratefully supported by any school within the borough.

G Griffith, 05.10.2021